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ABSTRACT

Individual variability in response to behavioral weight loss programs remains an unresolved and perplexing issue for health psychologists. Determining in advance who will succeed or fail at losing weight would be useful in devising programs that produce a more homogeneous and dramatic response to treatment. In order to examine which responses to an application and a relationship questionnaire relate to weight loss success, 23 couples participated in a 1-year correspondence weight reduction program. One person in each couple enrolled to lose weight and the other agreed to act as helper. Reducers completed an application form recording demographic information, reactions to past attempts at weight loss, and number of previous methods used. Helpers rated their willingness to perform weight-related tasks to help the reducer. Both reducers and helpers completed the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale. Analyses of results indicated that better educated reducers and helpers with fewer negative attitudes about past weight loss attempts and fewer prior attempts at losing weight performed better, and that those with partners less willing to aid them or with unsatisfying marital relationships lost the most weight. The findings suggest that the application items and the measure of relationship satisfaction may be useful predictors of weight loss. (PAS)

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Developing A Couples Application Form to Predict Weight Loss Success

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Developing A Couples Application Form to Predict Weight Loss Success

Individual variability in response to behavioral weight loss programs remains an unresolved and perplexing issue for health psychologists. While enrolled in behavioral weight loss programs, some individuals perform remarkably well and achieve their weight loss objectives and others perform quite poorly and may even gain weight. Therefore, determining in advance who would succeed or have difficulty losing weight would be useful in devising programs that would produce a more homogeneous and dramatic response to the treatment intervention. The present study was designed to meet this objective by examining which responses to an application and relationship questionnaire relate to weight loss success. A secondary purpose was to present questionnaire items that could be employed and further validated by other researchers working with couples who are interested in identifying prognostic indicators of weight loss success.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-three couples participated in a one year correspondence weight reduction program offered by the Stanford Heart Disease Prevention Program, Stanford School of Medicine. One person in each couple enrolled to lose weight and the other agreed to act as their "helper." The reducers included 6 men and 17 women between 28 and 62 years of age (M = 44.82 yrs.), who initially weighed 151 to 232 pounds (M = 186.14 lbs.) and were 37.65 to 84.25 percent overweight (M = 56.67%).

Procedure

As part of enrollment process, reducers were asked to complete an application form. They recorded demographic information, reactions to past

weight loss attempts and the number of previous weight loss methods used. Helpers, on the other hand, rated their willingness to perform various weight-related tasks designed to aid the reducer in losing weight. In addition, both the helper and reducer completed the Locke-Wallace (1959) Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS).

Results

Table 1 presents correlations between items on the application form and measures of body change at the end of the one year program. The majority of these correlations were statistically significant.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

Because of the growing interest and relative success of utilizing spouses in weight loss programs, an effort was made to isolate items on an initial application form and the MAS that would be helpful in predicting weight loss success. The findings of the present study show that better educated reducers (and helpers) with fewer negative attitudes about past weight loss attempts and fewer prior attempts at losing weight performed better. Also, those whose partners were less willing to aid the reducer in losing weight or whose marital relationship was rated less satisfying lost the most weight. One explanation for this counter-intuitive finding may be that the "uncooporative" attitude of the spouse and/or feelings of being moderately dissatisfied with the relationship serve as a motivator to reduce.

Although the findings are encouraging for identifying application items that may be useful predictors, sample size limitations suggest the need for further research. In particular, the application items as well as the measure of relationship satisfaction should be incorporated and further validated by other researchers in order to identify reliable and valid prognostic indicators of weight loss success for participants enrolled in couples programs.

Table 1

Correlations Between Application Items and Client Performance

Application Item	Performance Measure			
	Lbs. Lost	RQ[a]	% Fat Lost	Fat RQ[b]
1. Educational level of reducer	.37*	.23	.25	.23
Educational level of helper	.36*	.45*	.46*	.47*
2. Reactions about past wt. loss efforts	-.60*	-.61**	-.59**	-.55**
3. Number of previous wt. loss attempts	-.55**	-.40*	-.40*	-.35*
4. Helper's ratings of willingness to perform wt. loss tasks	-.42*	-.41*	-.56**	-.53**
5. MAS[c] scores for reducers	-.55**	-.56**	-.44*	-.43*
MAS[c] scores for helpers	-.34	-.20	-.51**	-.52**

[a] $RQ = \frac{\text{Lbs. Lost}}{\text{Initial Lbs. Overwt.}} \times 100.$

[b] $\text{Fat RQ} = \frac{\text{Fat Lost}}{\text{Initial Amt. Overfat}} \times 100.$

[c] MAS = Locke-Wallace (1959) Marital Adjustment Scale.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.